



A Review of Gambling Addiction and Attachment Styles in the Context of Emotion Regulation Processes

Kumar Bağımlılığı ile Bağlanma Stillerinin Duygu Düzenleme Süreçleri Bağlamında İncelenmesi

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Abstract:

Addiction is a condition characterized by a loss of control over a substance or behavior. Gambling addiction is a type of behavioral addiction that negatively affects an individual's social functioning, and in recent years, with increasing digitalization, it has become a significant public health problem. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between gambling addiction and attachment styles in the context of emotion regulation processes. In this study, Turkish and English studies published in the Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar databases between 2000 and 2025 were reviewed. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods peer-reviewed articles were examined, and the data were analyzed thematically. The study shows that insecure attachment styles increase the risk of gambling addiction, while secure attachment plays a protective role. Difficulties in emotion regulation stand out as an important variable mediating this relationship. In addition, escaping from negative emotions, stress, and anxiety is among the main motivations triggering gambling behavior. These findings show that gambling addiction is not only behavioral but also a multidimensional structure related to early attachment experiences and emotional regulation processes. Insecure attachment increases susceptibility to addictive behaviors through dysfunctional coping strategies. Gambling addiction is closely related to attachment styles and emotion regulation skills and should be addressed within a multidimensional and holistic psychosocial framework. In preventative measures, attachment-based approaches and interventions that improve emotion regulation skills are considered effective. In clinical practice, the use of attachment-focused interventions alongside cognitive behavioral therapy is recommended.

Keywords: Addiction, Gambling addiction, Attachment styles, Emotion regulation.

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Öz:

Bağımlılık, bireyin bir madde ya da davranış üzerinde kontrol kaybı yaşamasıyla karakterize edilen bir durumdur. Kumar bağımlılığı, bireysel ve toplumsal işlevselliği olumsuz etkileyen davranışsal bir bağımlılık türü olup son yıllarda artan dijitalleşme önemli bir halk sağlığı sorunu haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kumar bağımlılığı ile bağlanma stilleri arasındaki ilişkiyi duygu düzenleme süreçleri bağlamında incelemektir. Literatür taraması PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science ve Google Scholar veritabanlarında, 2000–2026 yılları arasında yayımlanmış çalışmalarla sınırlandırılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Tarama sürecinde Türkçe ve İngilizce anahtar kelimeler olarak “kumar bağımlılığı”, “problemli kumar”, “kumar oynama motivasyonu”, “bağlanma stilleri”, “güvensiz bağlanma”, “gambling addiction”, “problem gambling”, “attachment”, “emotion regulation” ve “coping” terimleri farklı kombinasyonlarla kullanılmıştır. Nicel, nitel ve karma yöntemli hakemli makaleler incelenmiş, veriler tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, güvensiz bağlanma stillerinin kumar bağımlılığı riskini artırdığını ve güvenli bağlanmanın koruyucu bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Duygu düzenleme güçlükleri bu ilişkide aracılık eden önemli bir değişken olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca olumsuz duygulardan kaçış, stres ve kaygı kumar davranışını tetikleyen temel motivasyonlar arasında yer almaktadır. Bu bulgular, kumar bağımlılığının yalnızca davranışsal değil, aynı zamanda erken dönem bağlanma deneyimleri ve duygusal düzenleme süreçleriyle ilişkili çok boyutlu bir yapı olduğunu göstermektedir. Güvensiz bağlanma, işlevsiz başa çıkma stratejileri yoluyla bağımlılık davranışlarına yatkınlığı artırır. Kumar bağımlılığı, bağlanma stilleri ve duygu düzenleme becerileriyle yakından ilişkili olup çok boyutlu ve bütüncül bir psikososyal çerçevede ele alınmalıdır. Önleyici çalışmalarda bağlanma temelli yaklaşımların ve duygu düzenleme becerilerini geliştiren müdahalelerin etkili olabileceği düşünülmektedir. Klinik uygulamalarda bilişsel davranışçı terapi ile birlikte bağlanma odaklı müdahalelerin kullanılması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bağımlılık, Kumar bağımlılığı, Bağlanma stilleri, Duygu düzenleme.

Introduction

Addiction is a condition in which an individual loses control over the use of a particular substance or the continuation of a certain behavior (Ertunç, 2019). Although the concept of addiction is often associated with substance-based addictions such as alcohol, drugs, or nicotine, it is not limited to substance use alone. It is known that certain behaviors, such as gambling, internet use, and gaming, also exhibit addiction-specific characteristics such as loss of control, persistence, and continuation despite negative consequences (İzci, Usta Sağlam & Ergelen, 2022). Gambling addiction is a type of behavioral addiction characterized by the continuation of gambling behavior despite negative consequences that adversely affect the individual's social life, family relationships, and occupational functioning (Aksoy, 2010). Gambling behavior is not only an individual choice but is also considered a multidimensional process that emerges from the interaction of psychological and environmental factors. In this context, gambling addiction is associated with numerous psychosocial problems such as depression, suicide attempts, economic losses, deterioration in interpersonal relationships, and family problems (Karakartal, 2023).

In recent years, with the proliferation of online betting and digital gambling platforms, gambling addiction has been recognized as an increasing global public health issue (Tran et al., 2024; World Health Organization, 2024). The development of technology and the widespread availability of online gambling platforms facilitate access to gambling behavior and therefore increase the risk (Ghelfi, 2024). Research shows that between 0.1% and 5% of adults develop a gambling disorder at some point in their lives (Hodgins et al., 2011; Gabellini et al., 2023).

Emotional processes play a significant role in the emergence and persistence of gambling behavior. Individuals who experience difficulties in emotion regulation may turn to behaviors such as gambling to

escape from or alleviate negative emotions (Estevez et al., 2017). In this context, inadequacies in emotion regulation skills are considered an important risk factor in the development of addictive behaviors. Indeed, Flores (2004) conceptualizes addiction as an attachment disorder and suggests that individuals attempt to compensate for unmet emotional needs through addictive behaviors (Sümer et al., 2015).

Attachment theory suggests that the relationships individuals develop with their caregivers during early childhood are decisive for their lifelong emotional regulation skills and interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). John Bowlby, the pioneer of the theory, stated that early attachment experiences shape individuals' internal working models, which in turn influence adult behavior (Bowlby, 2008). Subsequent studies developed by Mary Ainsworth revealed that secure or insecure attachment patterns formed during childhood differentiate individuals' coping methods with stress and their emotional regulation styles later in life (Demirel & Batman, 2023). Research examining the relationship between attachment styles and addictive behaviors shows that insecure attachment patterns are an important risk factor for developing addiction. In the literature, it is particularly noted that individuals with an anxious attachment style may turn to behaviors such as gambling in order to cope with feelings of emotional emptiness and fear of abandonment (Schindler et al., 2007; Ögel, 2019). Gambling addiction, which is considered a behavioral addiction, is also explained by similar psychological mechanisms. Gambling behavior can serve as a short-term relief and escape function for individuals; in particular, it is more easily reinforced in those who have difficulty with emotional regulation (Neophytou et al., 2023). At this point, attachment theory provides an important framework for explaining how individuals cope with stress, loneliness, and negative emotions.

It is important to consider gambling addiction not only as a behavioral tendency, but also in the context of an individual's emotional processes and relational experiences. In this context, attachment styles emerge as a fundamental variable in understanding gambling behavior. Accordingly, this study examines the relationship between gambling addiction and attachment styles and aims to address this relationship within the framework of emotion regulation processes.

Method

This study was prepared with the aim of systematically reviewing research examining the relationships among gambling behavior, gambling addiction, and attachment styles. The literature review was conducted using the PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases. The search process was limited to studies published between 2000 and 2026.

During the search, both Turkish and English keywords were used. In this context, the keywords “kumar bağımlılığı” (gambling addiction), “problemli kumar” (problem gambling), “kumar oynama motivasyonu” (gambling motivation), “bağlanma stilleri” (attachment styles), “güvensiz bağlanma” (insecure attachment), “attachment”, “gambling addiction”, “problem gambling”, “emotion regulation”, and “coping” were searched in various combinations.

The initial search yielded a total of 312 studies (PsycINFO: 58, PubMed: 46, Scopus: 72, Web of Science: 61, Google Scholar: 75). After removing duplicates, 214 studies were considered for evaluation. Following title and abstract screening, studies not directly related to the topic were excluded, and 96 studies were included for full-text review.

Following the full-text assessment, 52 studies that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed. In addition, 8 books, book chapters, and 3 thesis studies that provided theoretical contributions to the subject were also used as supporting sources.

The inclusion criteria for the study are as follows:

- Examines the relationship between gambling behavior or gambling addiction and attachment styles, emotion regulation, or coping processes
- Published in peer-reviewed journals
- Full-text is accessible
- Is of quantitative, qualitative, or systematic review type

The exclusion criteria are: • Studies that focus solely on other types of addiction and do not include gambling behavior

- Conference abstracts, editorial articles, and studies without an accessible full text
- Research that does not provide sufficient methodological information

The selected studies were examined using thematic content analysis. Content analysis is the process of systematically extracting and categorizing meaningful information from texts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During the analysis, the studies were classified according to common conceptual frameworks, and four main themes were identified:

1. Gambling motivations and reinforcers (n = 18)
2. Negative emotions and escape-based coping (n = 21)
3. Attachment styles and addiction relationship (n = 24)
4. Emotion regulation difficulties and psychological vulnerabilities (n = 19)

According to the analysis results:

In 24 studies, a significant and positive relationship was found between insecure attachment and gambling behavior.

In 21 studies, gambling was identified as a means of escaping negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, and depression.

In 18 studies, gambling behavior was found to be maintained through reward, excitement, and the expectation of gain.

In 19 studies, emotion regulation difficulties were reported to increase the risk of gambling addiction.

In 11 studies, secure attachment was emphasized as a protective factor.

These findings indicate that gambling addiction has a multidimensional structure and that, in particular, attachment styles and emotion regulation processes play an important role in the development and maintenance of this behavior. The data obtained were classified under thematic headings, including differences in gambling behavior by attachment style, risk and protective factors, relationships with psychosocial variables, and clinical implications. This methodological approach allowed for a multidimensional and holistic evaluation of the relationship between gambling addiction and attachment styles.

Findings

Summary of Included Studies (N = 52)

Table 1. Attachment-Focused Studies (N=24)

Author/Year	Type of Study	Sample	Key/Clinical Findings
Di Trani et al., 2017	Quantitative	Clinical sample	Insecure attachment increases gambling risk
Ghinassi & Casale, 2022	Systematic review	–	Attachment is an important risk factor
Jauregui & Estévez, 2020	Quantitative	Young sample	Attachment predicts gambling motivation
Keough et al., 2018	Quantitative	Adult sample	Depression mediates the relationship

Author/Year	Type of Study	Sample	Key/Clinical Findings
Monacis et al., 2017	Quantitative	Young sample	Insecure attachment increases addiction
Serna et al., 2019	Quantitative	Adolescent sample	Parenting styles are influential
Shin et al., 2011	Quantitative	Employee sample	Insecure attachment increases risk
Estévez et al., 2017	Quantitative	Clinical sample	Related to emotion regulation
Herstell et al., 2021	Meta-analysis	–	Transdiagnostic risk factor
Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019	Theoretical	–	Connection to emotion regulation
Flores, 2004	Theoretical	–	Addiction conceptualized as attachment disorder
Kohut, 1971	Theoretical	–	Development of the self
Bowlby, 1969	Theoretical	–	Attachment theory foundation
Bulut, 2017	Review	–	Developmental impact
Tüzün & Sayar, 2006	Review	–	Relationship development
Sümer et al., 2015	Review	–	Relationship with addiction
Demirel & Batman, 2023	Review	–	Social aspect
Schindler et al., 2007	Quantitative	Adolescent sample	Family attachment is influential
Topino et al., 2024	Quantitative	Gamblers	Alexithymia as a mediator
Favieri et al., 2025	Quantitative	Student sample	Emotion regulation as a mediator
Kılıç & Koç, 2024	Quantitative	Adolescent sample	Relationship with social media
Nigar & Can, 2025	Quantitative	Young sample	Psychological needs are associated
Gori et al., 2021	Quantitative	Adult sample	Multidimensional model proposed

Attachment-focused studies reveal that, in gambling behavior, especially insecure attachment patterns are consistently and strongly associated with gambling disorder. In this relationship, gambling behavior is directly influenced, and mediator variables such as depression,

emotion regulation difficulties, alexithymia, and impulsivity also play an important role. Systematic and meta-analytic findings support the view that attachment can be considered a transdiagnostic risk factor in explaining gambling behavior

Table 2. Studies Focused on Escape / Emotional Processes (N=21)

Author/Year	Type	Sample	Key/Clinical Findings
Wood & Griffiths, 2007	Qualitative	Gambling addicts	Gambling is an escape strategy
Neophytou et al., 2023	Systematic	-	Avoidance behavior increases
Takamatsu & Martens, 2016	Quantitative	Adult	Depression increases gambling
Grubbs & Rosansky, 2020	Quantitative	Adult	Escape motivation
Hagfors et al., 2022	Quantitative	Population	Sociodemographic effects
Lee et al., 2007	Quantitative	Adult	Motivation model
Lorains et al., 2011	Meta	-	High comorbidity
Nower & Blaszczynski, 2006	Theoretical	-	Model development
Rogier & Velotti, 2018	Theoretical	-	Emotion regulation model
Gori et al., 2021	Quantitative	Adult	Multifactorial structure

Author/Year	Type	Sample	Key/Clinical Findings
Ioniță et al., 2026	Systematic	-	Emotion regulation
Yüksel & Karaaziz, 2025	Review	-	Psychological process
İzci et al., 2022	Review	-	Neurobiology
Hong, 2024	Theoretical	-	Cultural evolution
Madden, 2026	Theoretical	-	Historical origins
Bayındır, 2018	Quantitative	Local	Social motivation
Çalın, 2019	Thesis	Clinical	Psychological symptom
Ertunç, 2019	Thesis	Clinical	Social function
Çakıcı, 2019	Review	-	Clinical process
Keough et al., 2018	Quantitative	Adult	Depression as a mediator
Di Trani et al., 2017	Quantitative	Clinical	Emotion regulation

In studies focused on escape and emotional processes, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of gambling behavior arises as a means of escaping negative affect and coping with stress. The research indicates that gambling, especially among individuals with high levels of

depression, anxiety, and stress, functions as a temporary relief mechanism; however, this situation reinforces the cycle of addiction in the long term. Qualitative studies support these findings, showing that gambling is often experienced as an “escape-based coping strategy.”

Table 3. *Motivation / Reinforcement-Focused Studies (N=18)*

Author/Year	Type	Sample	Key/Clinical Findings
Aktürk et al., 2024	Qualitative	Gamblers	Positive reinforcement
Grubbs & Rosansky, 2020	Quantitative	Adult	Expectancy effect
Hagfors et al., 2022	Quantitative	Population	Social differences
Kaya & Başkan, 2020	Quantitative	Adult	Gain motivation
Lee et al., 2007	Quantitative	Adult	Model
Lorains et al., 2011	Meta	-	Prevalence
Hammond, 2016	Review	-	Treatment aspect
Bahafzallah et al., 2020	Quantitative	Clinical	MI effect
İlgar & İlgar, 2019	Review	-	Therapy
Hodgins et al., 2001	Quantitative	Clinical	Motivation enhancement
Pallesen et al., 2005	Meta	-	Therapy effectiveness
Petry et al., 2007	Quantitative	Clinical	CBT effect
Cowlishaw et al., 2012	Systematic	-	Psychotherapy
Çakmak, 2018	Review	-	Clinical process
Çakıcı, 2019	Review	-	Evolution of addiction

Motivation- and reinforcement-focused studies reveal that both intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement mechanisms are effective in maintaining gambling behavior. The most frequently reported motivations include the expectation of financial gain, the pursuit of excitement, the need for

socialization, and the desire to escape from everyday life stress. The studies within this theme show that cognitive expectations and learned reinforcement processes are decisive in the persistence of gambling behavior.

Table 4. *Emotion Regulation-Focused Studies (N=19)*

Author/Year	Type	Sample	Key/Clinical Findings
Rogier & Velotti, 2018	Theoretical	-	Gambling disorder is associated with emotion regulation deficits
Estévez et al., 2017	Quantitative	Clinical / Adult	Attachment → emotion regulation → addiction
Neophytou et al., 2023	Systematic	-	Avoidant coping increases gambling
Ioniță et al., 2026	Systematic	-	Cognitive emotion regulation is a critical factor
Yıldız, 2025	Review	-	Emotion regulation is a core process in addiction
Favieri et al., 2025	Quantitative	University students	Emotion regulation difficulty plays a mediating role
Gori et al., 2021	Quantitative	Adult gamblers	Alexithymia and impulsivity are influential
Keough et al., 2018	Quantitative	Adult	Indirect effect via depression and attachment
Takamatsu et al., 2016	Quantitative	Clinical	Escape and coping motivation
Di Trani et al., 2017	Quantitative	Clinical	Relationship between attachment and alexithymia
Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019	Theoretical	-	Attachment–emotion regulation relationship
Flores, 2004	Theoretical	-	Addiction as an emotion regulation tool
Ghelfi et al., 2024	Systematic	-	Emotional processes as a risk factor
Gori et al., 2021	Quantitative	Adult	Multiple mediation model
Schindler et al., 2007	Quantitative	Adolescent	Family attachment → emotion control
Kılıç & Koç, 2024	Quantitative	Adolescent	Relationship between ERQ and addiction
Nigar & Can, 2025	Quantitative	Young	Emotion regulation difficulty increases addiction
Serna et al., 2019	Quantitative	Adolescent	Parenting → emotion regulation → risk
Shin et al., 2011	Quantitative	Employee	Insecure attachment → low emotion control
Monacis et al., 2017	Quantitative	Young	Relationship between identity and regulation
Topino et al., 2024	Quantitative	Gamblers	Alexithymia and impulsivity are influential

A review of the literature shows that gambling disorder is not a unidimensional behavior, but rather a multidimensional construct that can be explained by the interaction of attachment patterns, emotional regulation processes, and cognitive-motivational mechanisms. Therefore, it is concluded that a holistic approach—including not only behavioral aspects but also developmental and emotional roots—is necessary for the assessment and treatment of gambling addiction.

Gambling

The origins of gambling date back to prehistoric times. The reasons for chance and gambling extend as far back as the periods when people came together to socialize in human history (Madden, 2026). It has manifested itself in different societies and various social processes. Emerging as forms of entertainment in social life, these activities have also contributed to the development of a culture of playing games. As these games, which are part of entertainment, diversified, chance-based games that require no skill, also became widespread. Thus, games of

chance have found their place in different eras and cultures throughout history (Bayındır, 2018).

In the ancient period, gambling and games were not limited to Ancient Greece and Rome; similar games were played in other regions as well. Especially in games similar to backgammon, various tokens were used. Archaeological excavations in Egypt have revealed game pieces decorated with human skull symbols. These findings show that games were both widespread and carried symbolic meaning during that era (Çalın, 2019; Ertunç, 2019). Research indicates that gambling took various forms in primitive communities. Gambling addiction has been observed throughout history in places with different cultural structures, and gambling was initially used as a means of socialization and passing time (Madden, 2026; Hong, 2024).

With technological advancements, especially since the 1990s, gambling games have become more widespread and can now be played on digital devices such as phones. Gambling, originally used for purposes such as hunting in

ancient times, has evolved and diversified, becoming an economic tool today (Çakıcı, 2019). Initially played solely for entertainment, gambling has, over time, led to a loss of control in some individuals; this situation attracted the attention of specialists in the clinical field, leading to its scientific investigation.

Reasons for Gambling

Gambling behavior is associated with both psychological and social needs and motivations (Lee et al., 2007). Current research on the topic shows that individuals who gamble do so for a wide range of reasons (Hagfors, Castrén & Salonen, 2022). Among these reasons, motivations such as socialization, entertainment, escaping daily problems, seeking excitement, and obtaining financial gain are prominent (Lorains, Cowlishaw & Thomas, 2011). Studies on gambling addiction have shown that negative emotional states can increase the motivation to gamble among gamblers (Lee, Chae, Lee, Kim, 2007; Takamatsu & Martens, 2016). When people experience negative affect and have difficulty coping with stress, such as depression, stress, or anxiety, they may turn to gambling as an escape-based coping strategy to temporarily distance themselves from their distress (Nower & Blaszczynski, 2006). In their study, Kaya and Başkan (2020) stated that reasons for gambling include the desire to win money, the need for socialization, the search for entertainment or excitement, and the desire to escape from daily problems.

Gambling Addiction

Pathological gambling is defined as the inability to control gambling behavior in a way that negatively affects an individual's family and social relationships and occupational functioning, resulting in repeated unwanted behavior despite harm to the person's social and functional domains (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

With the publication of DSM-III in 1980, gambling addiction was defined for the first time in psychiatry as "pathological gambling" and was included in the first psychiatric classification as "Pathological Gambling" (PG). In the DSM-IV published in 1994, pathological gambling was not classified as an addiction but was included under the heading "impulse control disorders not elsewhere classified" and was not evaluated within the addiction class. With the most recent publication of DSM-5 in 2013, "Pathological Gambling" was included in the addictions category and classified as a "non-substance-related disorder" under "Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders."

DSM-5 criteria for gambling disorder include: being excessively preoccupied with gambling, needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve excitement (tolerance), feeling tense or restless when trying to stop or reduce gambling (withdrawal), repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling, making gambling a priority in important areas of life, continuing to gamble to escape from negative emotions, returning to gambling to try to win back lost money, harming significant relationships due to gambling, and relying on others for money to gamble—making up a total of 9 criteria. With DSM-5, certain changes were made in the definition of gambling disorder. For example, the criterion of resorting to illegal acts to finance gambling was removed, and the number of criteria required for diagnosis was reduced from 5 to 4 (Ögel et al., 2019).

Treatment of Gambling Addiction

Addiction treatment is examined in three stages. The first step is the detoxification process, during which the goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate withdrawal symptoms—such as anxiety, restlessness, and emotional fluctuations—that can occur in both behavioral and substance addictions (Hammond, 2016). In the first stage of treatment, medications may be used to alleviate withdrawal symptoms. Once these symptoms subside, the process moves to the second stage. At this stage, the main goal is to strengthen the individual's motivation to reduce the risk of relapse, teach ways to resist urges, and help develop healthier habits to replace the addiction (Bahafzallah et al., 2020). The third stage aims to prevent relapse and ensure long-term abstinence from addiction; however, decreased motivation and triggering situations can make this process challenging (Çakmak, 2018). At this point, especially in the second and third stages, psychotherapy approaches that focus on changing the individual's thoughts and behaviors play a significant role. Among these, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the most commonly used and proven effective methods (Petry et al., 2007; Cowlishaw et al., 2012). CBT stands out as one of the most effective approaches in the treatment of gambling disorder (Cowlishaw et al., 2012). Research has shown that this method is effective in reducing gambling frequency, alleviating symptoms, and decreasing financial losses (Petry et al., 2007; Cowlishaw et al., 2012). The main goal of CBT is to help the individual recognize unrealistic thoughts and habitual beliefs about gambling and to support them in changing these in a healthier way (Beck, 2011). During this process, clients learn to identify situations that trigger the urge to gamble, cope with these urges, and develop alternative behaviors; these skills acquired in therapy also help to reduce gambling behavior outside of therapy (Petry et al., 2007). In addition to CBT, Motivational Interviewing has been shown to have positive effects, both when used alone and in combination (İlgar & Coşgun-İlgar, 2019). However, some studies indicate that there is no significant superiority of one therapy method over another, and that focusing specifically on cognitive distortions does not always yield better results (Hodgins et al., 2001; Cowlishaw et al., 2012). Overall, psychotherapy practices are generally beneficial in the short and long term, but in some studies, the reliability of the results may be limited due to participant non-completion (Cowlishaw et al., 2012; Pallesen et al., 2005).

The Concept of Attachment and Attachment Styles

Attachment is defined as the strong emotional bond that a child forms with their primary caregiver. John Bowlby described attachment as an innate system that facilitates infants' survival. Through the bond they establish with their caregiver, infants feel safe and secure. This early relationship can later influence a person's emotions and the way they form relationships with others (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment develops during infancy and shapes an individual's relationships throughout their life (Bulut, 2017). When infants' needs are met, they begin to perceive their caregiver as a reliable figure. This process helps the individual's sense of self-worth develop positively. Secure attachment formed in infancy supports the development of healthy and close interpersonal relationships later in life (Tüzün & Sayar, 2006). On the other hand, if the caregiver is not consistent or attentive enough, the child may lose their sense of security and develop insecure attachment (Bulut, 2017).

Gambling and Attachment

Although insecure attachment alone does not constitute a disease or disorder, it can be considered a vulnerability factor that predisposes individuals to develop psychological problems (Herstell et al., 2021; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Addictive behaviors can be seen as a way for individuals to meet their “self-object needs” (Kohut, 1971) by turning to a drug, a specific activity (such as gambling), or any object that can reduce their sense of inner emptiness. In other words, people may repeatedly turn to drug use or rewarding, non-substance-related activities to compensate for emotional intimacy deficiencies (Flores, 2004). Therefore, some researchers consider addictive behaviors to be a kind of attachment disorder. In summary, individuals with an insecure attachment style who have difficulty controlling their emotions are more prone to engage in potentially addictive behaviors like gambling to meet their attachment needs (Flores, 2004).

Research shows that for some individuals, gambling may be a way to manage negative emotions (Di Trani et al., 2017; Rogier & Velotti, 2018). In other words, it has been observed that some people who experience anxiety, stress, or depressive feelings engage more frequently in gambling to alleviate these emotions, and this has also been observed in community samples (Keough et al., 2018). These findings suggest that attachment styles and negative emotions may play a significant role in the development of gambling addiction; for example, some gamblers may face anxiety, depression, or stressful life events prior to gambling (Gori et al., 2021).

Shin and colleagues (2011) found that problematic gambling behavior in adolescents is associated with insecure attachment styles; insecure attachment leads to a higher risk of addiction in individuals. Monacis and others (2017), in examples of online addiction, emphasized that individual differences can be explained by identity and attachment orientations, and particularly that insecure attachment increases addictive tendencies. Serna and colleagues (2019) reported that parenting styles affect internet and online gambling addiction, with protective parenting reducing addiction risk and risky parenting increasing it, noting that attachment styles play an important role in this process.

A systematic review by Ghinassi and Casale (2022) revealed that individuals' attachment styles play a significant role in gambling behaviors. According to this research, people with a secure attachment style are at lower risk for gambling. Additionally, insecure attachment styles not only directly increase gambling behaviors but also indirectly raise the risk of gambling by challenging a person's ability to control emotions and cope with stress. Moreover, these effects vary depending on age and attachment context; for instance, family relationships are more strongly linked to gambling behaviors in adolescents, while bonds with romantic partners are more influential among adults.

Discussion

In this review study, the relationship between gambling addiction and attachment styles has been addressed, particularly in the context of emotion regulation processes. The findings from the literature indicate that gambling addiction is not merely a behavioral tendency; instead, it is a multidimensional construct related to an individual's

early attachment experiences, emotional regulation capacity, and psychosocial functioning. Accordingly, gambling behavior can be considered an attempt by some individuals to achieve emotional balance (Aktürk, Karaman & Yaman, 2024; Ioniță et al., 2026). Empirical studies in this context have examined the predictive role of emotion regulation difficulties and coping strategies in the relationship between attachment styles and gambling behaviors (Jauregui & Estévez, 2020), have comparatively addressed the relationships between attachment and emotion regulation processes in behavioral addictions (Estévez et al., 2017), and have shown that variables such as alexithymia, impulsivity, and dissociation play mediating and moderating roles in the impact of attachment patterns on gambling severity (Topino et al., 2024).

The literature reveals that a variety of motivations influence the emergence of gambling behavior. Alongside factors such as socialization, entertainment, and the pursuit of excitement, escaping negative emotions is a significant motivating factor (Lorains et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2007). In this context, emotional states like stress, anxiety, and depression can trigger gambling behavior, and individuals may use gambling as a temporary means of relief (Takamatsu & Martens, 2016; Wood & Griffiths, 2007; Yüksel & Karaaziz, 2025). Similarly, Grubbs and Rosansky (2020) emphasized the effect of negative emotions on gambling urges and coping motivation, and showed that individuals are more likely to think about gambling when experiencing negative emotional states. The study's findings indicate that people are more likely to think about gambling when they are bored or experiencing stress, anxiety, or depressive moods. Moreover, these findings suggest that gambling can be used as a dysfunctional coping strategy.

From the perspective of attachment theory, it appears that individuals with insecure attachment styles use less effective strategies to cope with stress, which increases their tendency toward addictive behaviors. Recent studies also show significant relationships between insecure attachment and addictive behaviors, and that this relationship is largely explained by emotion regulation difficulties (Nigar & Can, 2025; Yıldız, 2025). Similarly, in the study by Kılıç and Koç (2024), it was found that emotion regulation processes play an important role in the relationship between attachment styles and addictive behaviors in adolescents. This finding suggests that similar psychological mechanisms operate in the context of gambling addiction. In the context of gambling addiction, secure attachment is a protective factor that enables individuals to cope with stress more effectively, whereas insecure attachment styles make individuals more emotionally vulnerable (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). In this regard, the literature shows that there are significant relationships between insecure attachment styles and gambling addiction; it is particularly noted that individuals with an anxious attachment style may be more prone to gambling behavior due to intense anxiety, fear of abandonment, and feelings of emotional emptiness (Keough et al., 2018). Overall, the literature demonstrates both direct and indirect relationships between insecure attachment and gambling behavior (Gori et al., 2021; Ghinassi & Casale, 2023), with emotion regulation processes playing a decisive role in this relationship. It is stated that individuals who have difficulty identifying and regulating their emotions are more prone to addictive

behaviors (Di Trani et al., 2017; Rogier & Velotti, 2018). This situation suggests that while gambling provides short-term relief, it may create a cycle that increases the risk of addiction in the long term. The study by Favieri, Forte, Casagrande, and Tambelli (2025) also parallels these findings by addressing addiction within an attachment-based framework. Furthermore, studies conducted with adolescent and adult samples show that insecure attachment is not limited to gambling addiction but is also associated with internet and other types of behavioral addictions (Shin et al., 2011; Monacis et al., 2017; Serna et al., 2019). This suggests that attachment styles are an important psychological variable in general addiction risk.

In conclusion, the literature indicates that secure attachment is a protective factor, whereas insecure attachment is a risk factor. This effect is particularly mediated by emotion regulation difficulties and increases the propensity for gambling behavior (Ghinassi & Casale, 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this review study, the relationship between gambling addiction and attachment styles was addressed, particularly in the context of emotion regulation processes. The literature findings indicate that gambling addiction cannot be considered merely as a behavioral loss of control; rather, it is a multidimensional construct closely related to early attachment experiences, the individual's emotional regulation capacity, and psychosocial functioning. Insecure attachment styles, especially anxious and avoidant attachment, appear to weaken individuals' coping skills with stress, thereby increasing the tendency towards gambling behavior. In contrast, secure attachment serves as a protective factor, helping individuals develop healthier coping strategies. Furthermore, emotion regulation difficulties have been identified as a central mediating variable in this relationship; gambling behavior is reinforced due to its function in escaping negative emotions and providing short-term relief.

When the findings are evaluated as a whole, it is clear that attachment patterns and emotional processes play a critical role in the development of gambling addiction. Therefore, approaches that take into account not only behavioral interventions but also the individual's relational and emotional structure are important. For future research in

this area, longitudinal studies are needed. Long-term follow-up studies are important to better understand the causal role of attachment styles in the development of gambling behavior. In addition, it is recommended to develop multivariate models that examine in more detail the mediating and moderating effects of emotion regulation difficulties.

In terms of clinical practice, it may be beneficial to integrate attachment-based interventions and psychoeducational studies aimed at improving emotion regulation skills into gambling addiction treatment programs. In addition to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approaches, therapeutic interventions that target interpersonal relationships and early attachment experiences may enhance treatment effectiveness. Furthermore, conducting early screening studies in adolescents and young adults identified as at risk is important for identifying insecure attachment patterns and emotion regulation difficulties. Developing preventive intervention programs may be an effective strategy in reducing the prevalence of gambling addiction. Additionally, it is recommended to increase public awareness efforts, develop protective policies regarding the risks posed by the accessibility of online gambling platforms, and expand family-based prevention programs.

Declarations

Ethics Committee Approval and Informed Consent
Not applicable.

Publication Permission
Not applicable.

Availability of Data and Materials
Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Y.T. and A.T. and M.Ç. developed the concept and design of the study. The literature review was conducted by Y.T. and A.T. and M.Ç. The manuscript was written by Y.T. and reviewed and edited by A.T. All authors have read and approved the final version.

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